

CASSIODORUS AND THE SCHOOL OF NISIBIS

GIANFRANCO FIACCADORI

A recent contribution by R. Macina¹ focuses on a celebrated passage of Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*: "Nisus sum cum beatissimo Agapito papa urbis Romae ut, sicut in Alexandria multo tempore fuisse traditur institutum, nunc etiam in Nisibi civitate Syrorum Hebraeis sedulo fertur exponi, collatis expensis in urbe Romana professores doctores scholae potius acciperent Christianae. . . ."² Rejecting all previous interpretations (and the relevant hypotheses on the "Jewish Academy" of Nisibis),³ Macina offers the following: "Aussi je n'épargnai aucun effort, avec l'aide du très saint pape Agapet, pour que, à l'instar de ce que nous savons de l'existence à Alexandrie, pendant longtemps, d'une telle institution, et comme, aujourd'hui encore, on nous rapporte qu'à Nisibe, ville des Syriens, (cette institution) est dispensée avec zèle aux Hébreux, (j'ai donc fait tous mes efforts) pour que, sur collectes des fonds pour les dépenses, dans la ville de Rome, ce soient plutôt les écoles chrétiennes qui s'assurent les services de maîtres notoires (professos). . . ."⁴

Such a translation does not require extensive

discussion. As the context clearly implies, and as most interpreters have long recognized,⁵ *institutum*, predicate noun of *fuisse*, means here "custom" and cannot possibly be the subject of *fertur*; actually, the subject of both *traditur* and *fertur* is an understood neuter (*hoc*), which refers to the situation indicated in the "substantive" clause introduced by *ut*.⁶ In turn, *Hebraeis* is a "dativus auctoris" of the simplest kind, as in Cicero's classic example: "illa nobis alio tempore . . . explicabuntur."⁷ Let us, then, restore the original meaning to Cassiodorus' words: "Together with the most holy Agapetus, Pope of the city of Rome, I strove (to see to it) that in Rome, once the funds had been supplied, the Christian schools, more than others, be able to acquire acknowledged professors, as is reported was for long a custom in Alexandria and as we are told is zealously displayed even now by the Jews at Nisibis, city of the Syrians. . . ."

Apart from Latin syntax, it still seems very difficult to admit as possible, on this basis, "l'existence d'une prédication, voire d'un enseignement public spécialement destiné aux Juifs à Nisibe; le foyer en étant—bien entendu—l'École de Nisibe";⁸ as well

¹"Cassiodore et l'École de Nisibe. Contribution à l'étude de la culture chrétienne orientale à l'aube du moyen âge," *Muséon*, 95 (1982), 131–66.

²I. *Praef.*, I, ed. P. Garet (Rouen, 1679), in PL, 70 (1865), col. 1105 D ("S. ab Hebraeis"; cf. *Vita C.*, I, 43, PL, 69, col. 458 C: "S. Hebraeis") = R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1937), 3, line 7 ff. On Garet's "method," see now J. W. Halporn, "The Editing of Patristic Texts: The Case of Cassiodorus," *REAug.*, 30 (1984), 113 and note 25.

³J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, III, 2 (Rome, 1728), CMXXVIII (cf. I[1719], 206 a–b); J.-B. Chabot, "L'École de Nisibe, son histoire, ses statuts," *JA*, 9th ser., 8 (1896), 59; J. B. Segal, "The Jews of North Mesopotamia before the Rise of the Islam," in J. M. Grintz and J. Liver (eds.), *Sepher Segal*, Isr. Soc. for Bibl. Research, XVII (Jerusalem, 1964), 42* f.; *Edessa. 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford, 1970), 150 and note 2; A. Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis*, CSCO, 266, Subs. 26 (Louvain, 1965), 194 f., note 42 ("The reading 'Hebraeis' is obviously a mistake for 'hebraice'"); L. W. Jones (trans.), *An Introduction to Divine and Human Reading, by Cassiodorus Senator* (New York, 1966), 67 and note 2; M. L. Clarke, *Higher Education in the Ancient World* (London, 1971), 129, on which, see *infra* and note 16.

⁴"Cassiodore," 138.

⁵E.g., Jones, 67, and, implicitly, J. J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1978), 182.

⁶On the inadequacy of the "nominal" terminology here employed only for the sake of convenience, see, e.g., D. J. Allerton, "Grammatical Subject as a Psycho-Linguistic Category," *TPhS* (1980), 40–61, esp. 46 ff., and P. H. Matthews, *Syntax*, Cambr. Textb. in Linguistics (Cambridge, 1981), 102 ff.

⁷*Inv.*, I, 86, cf. J. B. Hofmann and A. Szantyr, *Lateinische Syntax und Stylistik*, HB. d. Altertumswiss., II, 2, 2 (Munich, 1965), 97, § 67 c. See also A. Ernout and F. Thomas, *Syntaxe Latine*, Nouv. coll. à l'usage des classes, XXXVIII (Paris, 2nd ed., 1953), 75, § 95; in particular, B. E. Skahill, *The Syntax of the Variae of Cassiodorus*, The Catholic Univ. of America St. in Mediev. and Renais. Latin, III (Washington, D. C., 1934), 37, § 7, and F. A. Bieter, *The Syntax of the Cases and Praepositions in Cassiodorus' Historia Ecclesiastica Tripartita*, St. in Mediev. and Renais. Latin, VI (1938), 60, § 7, and 75 f., § 9, both with examples. After all, even the pseudo-correction *ab H.*, received in PL (*supra*, note 2), points to the "agent."

⁸"Cassiodore," 151. Indeed, Nisibis boasted "the only large Jewish community in Northern Mesopotamia"; but it is worth repeating that, if the city was ever the "seat of a Jewish academy of learning whose fame was acknowledged in the first century

as the author's further conclusions.⁹ For my own part, since Macina ascertains the "interchangeability" of *Judaei* and *Hebraei* in the text of Cassiodorus¹⁰ while touching very lightly upon the accusation of "Judaizing" usually brought against Nestorians,¹¹ I must draw attention to a few more instances of the use of the term "Jew(ish)" as "Nestorian" in reliable "Syriac" sources. Severus of Antioch speaks of "the darkness of the cult of that fellow Nestorius—or rather the Jewish odiousness and ugliness—I mean the duality of the natures [of Jesus]."¹² According to [Zacharias Rhetor], the Emperor Anastasius addressed the Nestorian clergy of Constantinople as "accursed Jews,"¹³ and the screaming mob denounced Macedonius as "Jewish bishop."¹⁴ The *Acta* of the "Latrocinium Ephesinum" mention that the

inhabitants of Edessa, in their execration of the "Nestorian" Ibas (Hībā), exclaimed: "No one wants a Jew as bishop! . . . | . . . No one wants the friend of the Jews! No one wants the enemy of God!"¹⁵

Thus the passage in question does not allude so much to "Syriac-speaking Nestorian Christians"¹⁶ as it probably echoes the contemporary religious polemic; and it is symptomatic that the Monophysites gave the "theological" appellation "Jew(ish)" even to their Chalcedonian opponents, whom they considered to be genuine "Nestorians."¹⁷ In any case, that polemic was particularly alive in the Byzantine capital, where Cassiodorus spent some years (at least from 549 to 553) after the Three Chapters controversy,¹⁸ and where he could also have heard of the "Nisibean experiment" through personal contacts.¹⁹ His referent appears to be quaestor Juni-

by Rabbis of Palestina" (J. B. Segal, "Mesopotamian Communities from Julian to the Rise of Islam," *ProcBrAc*, 41 [1955], 123 and note 2, with reference to the Bab. Talmud, this "Academy" has nothing to do with the "School of Nisibis," which was founded three centuries later. See, e.g., Chabot, "École," 43 ff., and Stein, *Bas-Empire*, II (Brussels-Paris, 1949), 37 and note 1; more recently, N. Pigulevskaja, *Les Villes de l'état iranien aux époques parthe et sassanide. Contribution à l'histoire sociale de la Basse Antiquité* [1956], EPHE, VI^e sect.: Docum. et rech. sur l'économ. des pays byz., islam. et slaves . . . au Moyen Âge, VI (Paris, 1963), 244–51, App. III, "L'École de N.," and *Istorija Nisibijskoj Akademii, Istočniki po istorii sirijskoj školy* ["History of the Acad. of N., Notes for the History of the Syrian School"], PS, 80, N.S., 17 (1967), 90–109, on which, P. Lemerle, *Le Premier humanisme byzantin*, Bibl. Byz.-Et., 6 (Paris, 1971), 24 and note 3, 51 f. and note 17, with further indications.

⁹*Op. cit.*, 156 ff.: "B. La Catéchèse forcée des 'Hébreux de Nisibe.' Mythe ou réalité?"; cf. 35: ". . . un enseignement, voire une catéchèse chrétienne nestorienne des Juifs."

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 141–45.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 141. For Nestorians "affected by the sickness of the Jews," see also Joh. Ruf., *Pleroph.*, 14, ed. and trans. F. Nau, in PO, 8/1 (1911), 30 [430], lines 11 and 13 f. (cf. Segal, "Jews," 54* f., 58* f. and note 105; "Mesopotamian Communities," 122 f. and note 1), reproduced by [Dion. Tellmahār], *Chron. Zuqnān.*, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, I, CSCO, 91, Syr. 43 (1927), 219, line 19 f. = 121, Syr. 66 (1949), 163, line 18. Besides, A. de Halleux, "Die Genealogie des Nestorianismus nach der frühmonophysitischen Theologie," *OrChr*, 66 (1982), 4 ff. A very interesting piece of evidence is supplied by the dossier concerning the 6th-c. events of Naḡrān: cf. my "Yemen nestoriano," in *Studi in onore di E. Bresciani*, ed. S. F. Bondi, S. Pernigotti, F. Serra and A. Vivian (Pisa, 1984), [2] and notes 22–26, [8] against L. Van Rompay, "The Martyrs of Najran. Some Remarks on the Nature of the Sources," in *Studia P. Naster oblata*, II. *Orientalia antiqua*, ed. J. Quaegebeur, OLA, 13 (Louvain, 1982), 304 ff.

¹²*Hom.*, 56, ed. and trans. R. Duval, I, in PO, 4/1 (1906), 80 [80], lines 9 ff. and 11 ff.; trans. Segal, "Jews," 58*, and *Edessa*, 102 (cf. note 2. I wish to thank E. K. Chrysos for bringing this page to my attention and for useful suggestions).

¹³*Hist. eccl.*, VII, 8, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, II, CSCO, 84, Syr. 39 (1921), 45, line 29–46, line 1 = 88, Syr. 42 (1924), 31, line 26 (= F. J. Hamilton and E. W. Brooks, *The Syriac Chronicle Known as that of Zachariah of Mytilene* [London, 1899], 174; Segal, *Edessa*, 102 (cf. note 3).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 46, line 16 f. = 32, line 6 (= Hamilton and Brooks, 175); Segal, *loc. cit.*

¹⁵Ed. J. Flemming and trans. G. Hoffmann, *Akten der Ephesischen Synode vom Jahre 449*, AbhGött, Phil.-hist. Kl., n. F., 15/1 (Berlin, 1917), 16, line 20, 18, line 18 f. = 17, line 26, 19, line 25 f. (= *Festschrift Herrn Dr. J. Olshausen . . . gewidmet . . . Verhandlungen der Kirchenversammlung zu Ephesus am XXII. August CDXLIX* [Kiel, 1873], 8, line 29, 9, line 27 f., slightly different); Segal, *Edessa*, 94, 103 and note 1 (with no reference). See also J. P. Martin, "Le Brigandage d'Éphèse d'après ses Actes récemment découverts," *RSE*, 29, 3rd ser., 9 (1874), 528 f.; *Le Pseudo-Synode connu dans l'histoire sous le nom de brigandage d'Éphèse* (Paris, 1875), 134 f.; P. Peeters, "La Vie de Rabboula, évêque d'Édesse († 7 août 436)," in *Mélanges de Grandmaison* (Paris, 1928: RSR, 18), 204 and note 114 (= *Recherches d'histoire et de philologie orientales*, SubsHag, 27 [Brussels, 1951], I, 170 and note 1).

¹⁶Clarke, *loc. cit.* (italics mine). Against this "linguistic" exegesis of *Hebraei* (cf. also Vööbus, *supra*, note 3) the objections raised by Macina, 139 f., are, to a certain extent, still valuable.

¹⁷To the references available in Segal, *Edessa*, 102 and note 1, 103 and note 1, one can add those to Paul "the Jew," patriarch of Antioch (519–521): [Zach. Rhet.], *Hist. eccl.*, VIII, 1, Brooks, II, 62, line 8 = 42, line 23 f. (= Hamilton and Brooks, 190), and II, 6, *ibid.*, 83, line 10 = 57, line 13 (= 212); Mich. Syr., *Chron.*, IX, 12, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, IV (Paris, 1910), 265 c, line 38 = II (1901), 170 b; IX, 14, *ibid.*, 267 a, line 35 f., 268 b, line 18 = 173 b, 174 a. Cf. P. Allen, *Evagrius Scholasticus. The Church History*, Spicil. Sacrum Lovan. Ét. et Doc., 41 (Louvain, 1981), 174 note 6, 177 and note 29. See also Th. Nöldeke in GGA (1882), 201 f.; J. Lebon, *Le Monophysisme sévérien*, Univ. Cath. Lov. Diss. Theol., 2nd ser., IV (Louvain, 1909), 501–26; L. Van Rompay, "A Letter of the Jews to the Emperor Marcian Concerning the Council of Chalcedon," *OLP*, 12 (1981), 220 ff., and "Martyrs," 304 ff. (and note 23), on which, *supra*, note 11.

¹⁸A. van de Vyver, "Cassiodore et son œuvre," *Speculum*, 6 (1931), 254 and note 4; "Les Institutiones de Cassiodore et sa fondation à Vivarium," *RBén*, 53 (1941), 84; A. Momigliano, "Cassiodorus and the Italian Culture of His Time," *ProcBrAc*, 41 (1955), 219 and note 74, 233 f. (= *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* [Rome, 1960], 210); "Cassiodoro," in *DBI*, 21 (1978), 498 b; O'Donnell, 132 f., 135 f.; R. Farioli, "La trichora di S. Martino e il monastero Vivariense sive Castellense di Cassiodoro," in *Ἀπαρχαί. Nuove ricerche e studi sulla Magna Grecia e la Sicilia antica in onore di P. E. Arias*, ed. M. L. Gualandi, L. Massei, and S. Settis (Pisa, n.d., pub. 1982), II, 669 and note 3.

¹⁹O'Donnell, 133 f., cf. Momigliano, "Cassiodoro," 500 a. In this connection, it may be of some interest to note that Paul the Persian, whose command of Greek is well known, also resided

lius' "Syrorum schola in Nisibi . . . ubi divina lex per magistros publicos . . . ordine ac regulariter traditur."²⁰ Beyond any confessional reservation or

in Constantinople after 533 (however, he left not later than 547). On his life and personality, see especially: G. Mercati, "Per la vita e gli scritti di 'Paolo il Persiano,' Appunti da una disputa di religione sotto Giustino e Giustiniano," in *Note di letteratura biblica e cristiana antica*, ST, 5 (Vatican City, 1901), 180–98; P. Peeters, "Traductionis et traducteurs dans l'hagiographie byzantine," *AnalBoll*, 40 (1922), 295 and note 3 (= *Orient et Byzance. Le Tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine*, SubsHag, 26 [Brussels, 1950], 215 and note 4); A. Guillaumont, "Justinien et l'Église de Perse," *DOP*, 23–24 (1969–70), 47 f.; and D. Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the classification of the parts of Aristotle's philosophy: a milestone between Alexandria and Bagdād," *Der Islam*, 60 (1983), 238 f. and notes 14–16. Some further references to Paul and his identity will be found in my forthcoming contribution "Masidis" (Joh. Nik., *Chron.*, XC, 54–60), where the notorious magician (*mašarrey*) is shown to be none else than Photinus (Φωτεινός, Arab. **Futīnūs*), the Manichaean protagonist of the *Disputatio* which took place in Constantinople between 1 April and 1 August 527.

²⁰*Inst. reg., Ep. ad Primas.*, in PL, 68 (1866), col. 15 c = ed. H. Kihn, *Theodorus von Mopsuestia u. Junilius Africanus als Exegeten* (Freiburg i. Br., 1880), 468, line 2 ff. (cf. Cassiod., *Inst.*, I,

rather the obvious tribute to orthodoxy (no more than a hint, yet well-calculated: *Hebraeis*),²¹ this very image of the Nestorian "civitas Syrorum" is the only one compatible with the ideal "scholae Christianae" that Cassiodorus and Pope Agapetus planned to establish in Rome.²²

Dumbarton Oaks

10, 1, Garet, col. 1122D = Mynors, 34, line 11, on which, Macina, 133 f. and note 15). See H. I. Marrou, "Autour de la bibliothèque du Pape Agapit," *MélRome*, 48 (1931), 128 and notes 6–7 (= *Christiana Tempora. Mélanges d'histoire, d'archéologie, d'épigraphie et de patristique*, Coll. de l'Éc. Fr. de Rome, 35 [Rome, 1978], 171); P. Courcelle, *Les Lettres grecques en Occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore* (Paris, 1948), 336 and notes 3–5; Momigliano, "Cassiodorus," 219 and note 70, 233 (= 210). On Junilius Africanus, besides the references given *supra*, note 19, cf. L. Pirot, s.v., in *DTC*, VIII, 2 (1947), cols. 1171 ff., and Stein, II, 633 and note 2, 679 note 4, and 735 f.

²¹On Cassiodorus' theological position, see O'Donnell, 133 f., 169 ff.

²²For the historical background, see in particular W. Ensslin, "Papst Agapetus I. und Kaiser Justinian I.," *HJ*, 77 (1958), 456–66.